

January 11, 2005

The Honorable Board of Supervisors  
County of Los Angeles  
500 West Temple Street  
Los Angeles, California 90012

Dear Supervisors:

**SAFELY SURRENDERED AND ABANDONED INFANTS  
IN LOS ANGELES COUNTY - 2002**

On January 20, 2004, your Board received and approved ICAN's report entitled *Safely Surrendered and Abandoned Infants in Los Angeles County*. This report included data, findings and recommendations covering the calendar year 2002. Enclosed please find ICAN's 2<sup>nd</sup> annual report entitled *Safely Surrendered and Abandoned Infants in Los Angeles County, 2002-2003* which includes a fairly comprehensive profile of safely surrendered and abandoned infants and their mothers through 2003.

Based on this report, **IT IS RECOMMENDED THAT YOUR BOARD REQUEST THAT:**

- The Coroner's Office, District Attorney, Sheriff's Department and DCFS continue to support ICAN's efforts to collect data and provide notification of surrenders/abandonment.
- The Departments of Children and Family Services (DCFS), Health Services (DHS), Public Social Service (DPSS) and Mental Health (DMH) continue to support the efforts of ICAN's Speaker's Bureau to educate public and private entities. All County Departments conducting training on safely surrendered newborns should emphasize that concerned individuals should reach out to women they believe may be pregnant rather than reinforcing denial of the pregnancy
- The findings and recommendations of this report be utilized in the collaborative efforts of ICAN and the Children's Planning Council (CPC) as they reconvene the Safe Haven Task Force. ICAN and CPC should jointly report back to the Board of Supervisors at its March 8, 2005 meeting.

These recommendations are based on ICAN's report findings, including the following:

- In 2002, 10 infants were safely surrendered; in 2003, 8 infants were safely surrendered. Thirteen infants were abandoned in 2002 (five surviving and 8 deceased); 8 infants were abandoned in 2003 (1 surviving and 7 deceased).
- Mothers who safely surrendered or abandoned their infants do not *typically* fit a stereotypical picture of an unmarried teenager with no other children. Mothers ranged in age from 17 to 42 years; spanned ethnic, socioeconomic and marital categories; and included those with and without other children.
- Surrenders/abandonment occurred throughout the County in both 2002 and 2003. However, in 2002 14 of the 23 abandoned/surrendered infants were found/surrendered in economically depressed neighborhoods in SPAs 6, 7 and 8. No infants were abandoned or surrendered in SPA 5, a SPA with significantly fewer children living in poverty. This type of clustering was less evident in 2003.
- Seventeen of the 18 safely surrendered infants have been placed for adoption through the Department of Children and Family Services Adoptions Division and one child was reclaimed and returned to her mother.

ICAN continues to notify Board Offices, the Chief Administrative Office, State Department of Social Services, First 5 LA and others of incidents of abandonment and safe surrender as they occur. ICAN will also continue to collect and analyze data and manage the Speaker's Bureau to assure safe surrender training is available to both public and private agencies.

Questions regarding this report or ICAN's Speaker's Bureau can be directed to me or Tish Sleeper (626-455-4585).

Respectfully submitted,

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Executive Director

c: David Jansen, Chief Administrative Officer  
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**Safely Surrendered and Abandoned Infants  
In Los Angeles County – 2002 and 2003**

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## **Safely Surrendered and Abandoned Infants in Los Angeles County – 2002 - 2003**

Tragically, newborn infants have been abandoned in an unsafe manner throughout Los Angeles County for years. While statistics for abandoned infants fortunate enough to survive are unavailable for 1999 and 2000, the Coroner reported to ICAN's Child Death Review Team that six abandoned newborns died in 1999 and three abandoned newborns died in 2000. It is important to note that these data reflect only those deceased abandoned infants whose bodies were found; we can never truly know the number of abandoned infants in Los Angeles County, as it is highly likely that the bodies of some deceased infants are never discovered.

Concerned with newborn abandonment throughout the State, the California legislature passed SB 1368 (Brulte) in the year 2000. As with similar laws enacted in other states, SB 1368's intent was to encourage parents who would otherwise abandon their infants in unsafe environments (e.g., trash dumpsters) to leave their newborns in as safe a manner as possible. The law decriminalizes the act of infant abandonment in very specific circumstances, specifying that an infant must be 72 hours of age or younger and surrendered at a hospital emergency room or other site designated by the County Board of Supervisors. SB 1368, sometimes called the "Safe Haven Law," went into effect on January 1, 2001. Unfortunately, during the year 2001, no infants were safely surrendered in Los Angeles County and 14 newborns were abandoned—3 survived and 11 died.

Alarmed by the number of infants that continued to be abandoned despite the passage of SB 1368, Supervisor Don Knabe made a motion unanimously carried by the Board on February 5, 2002. The motion directed several agencies to jointly submit a report to the Board with recommendations on how to best implement SB 1368 in Los Angeles County. Convened by the Children's Planning Council, a multi-disciplinary task force met for several months to meet this Board mandate. On June 4, 2002, the task force presented the Board of Supervisors with twelve recommendations intended to best implement the law. The Board approved these recommendations which included proposals for a public information campaign, Speaker's Bureau, training and education, legal review for possible recommendations for legislative changes and designation of additional safe haven sites. In addition, the Board also requested that:

. . . ICAN—with the support of the Director of DCFS and input from the District Attorney's Office—and the directors of DHS and DMH (shall) identify a key set of data elements that will be collected regarding all

newborns safely surrendered or abandoned in Los Angeles County, consistent with State instructions for data collection through the Child Welfare System/Case Management System . . .

In July 2002, ICAN convened a multi-disciplinary group of interested agency representatives to identify data elements to be collected for safely surrendered and abandoned infants (those who survive and those who do not) as well as their mothers and fathers. Data elements were identified based on their usefulness in best implementing the law in Los Angeles County. In other words, the group sought to determine the characteristics of women who took advantage of the Safe Haven law and the characteristics of women who continued to abandon their newborns in an unsafe manner. On a broader level, the group wanted to establish data that would aid in analyzing the overall effectiveness of the law. See Attachment 1 for a complete listing of the data elements established by this group.

Throughout the past two and a half years, ICAN has collected data with the assistance of the Department of Coroner, Department of Children and Family Services, District Attorney's Office and various law enforcement agencies across the County. The body of this report presents a breakdown and analysis of the data collected for safely surrendered and abandoned infants—those who survived and those who died—for the years 2002 and 2003. Also included are limited, but disturbing, profiles of mothers who abandoned their infants as well as information, when available, on mothers' family circumstances and motivation to safely surrender or abandon their newborns. This report also addresses the positive outcomes of the Safe Haven Law and Los Angeles County's efforts to implement the law: the adoption of seventeen safely surrendered infants.

It is hoped that the information contained in this report will be utilized to develop public information strategies that will most effectively reach women who may be at risk of abandoning their newborns in an unsafe manner. In this effort, ICAN has worked on public information campaigns and continues to inform both public and private entities about the Safe Haven Law. ICAN manages an active, successful Speaker's Bureau, reaching over 700 individuals to date, with the intention that these individuals will continue to spread the word about the availability of the safe surrender option to those with whom they have contact.

## **What Have We Learned from the Data?**

Data on safely surrendered and abandoned infants are collected by ICAN in an effort to determine how to best implement the Safe Haven Law in Los Angeles County. Efforts are made to gather information about mothers who safely surrendered their infants and those who abandoned their newborns in an unsafe manner to see if there are differences in these two groups or if either group “fit a profile.”

The data collected for 2002 and 2003 indicate that mothers who surrender or abandon their children do not *typically* fit the stereotypical picture of a young, unmarried teenager with no other children.

### **MOTHERS' AGES**

- The known age range of mothers who *safely surrendered* their infants in 2002 is from 17 to 42 years, with an average age of 28 years; four of the five mothers whose ages were known were age 25 or over. While the known ages of mothers who *abandoned* their infants in 2002 ranged from 16 to 34 years and averaged a somewhat younger age of 23, sample sizes are too small to indicate a statistically significant difference between the two groups.
- The known age range of mothers who *safely surrendered* their infants in 2003 is from 17 to 31 years, with an average age of 22 ½ years. Of the 8 mothers who *abandoned* their infants in 2003, ages of only two mothers are known; one mother was age 16 at the time she abandoned her child and the other mother was age 22.

### **MOTHERS' FAMILY SITUATIONS**

Mothers who safely surrendered their infants were sometimes married and/or had other children, and in fact, those mothers who stated their motivation for surrendering their infants frequently mentioned an inability to care for another child.

- In 2002, two *surrendering* mothers were known to have been married at the time of surrender. For the five *abandoning* mothers who were identified in 2002, two had older children at the time of the abandonment. None of the identified abandoning mothers were married at the time of the abandonment.
- In 2003, information about family circumstances was known for four of the eight *surrendering* mothers. Of these four, it is known that three mothers were unmarried and it is unknown if the fourth was married. Three surrendering mothers were known to have other children while one did not. Of the eight *abandoning* mothers in 2003 only two were identified and both were single and had no other children.

## **ETHNICITY**

Mothers who surrendered and abandoned their infants did not differ from one another by ethnicity and did not fit a specific type of ethnic or socioeconomic picture. In 2002, safely surrendered and abandoned infants were Hispanic, Caucasian and African American. In 2003, in addition to Hispanic, African American and Caucasian infants, two infants of Filipino ethnicity were abandoned.

- In 2002, the majority of children safely surrendered *and* abandoned were Hispanic (13 of 23); in Los Angeles County the Hispanic birth rate outpaces birth rates among African American, Caucasian and Asian/Pacific Islander women. African Americans represented 7 of the 23 infants; at almost a third of the infants, this number outpaces the number of African American births in Los Angeles County. Caucasians represented 2 of the infants for whom data were collected, and one deceased abandoned infant was of unknown ethnicity.
- As in 2002, in 2003, the most represented ethnic group of safely surrendered and abandoned children were Hispanic (5 of 16), followed by Caucasian infants (4 of 16) and African American infants (3 of 16). In addition two Asian/Pacific Islander (Filipino) infants and two infants of unknown ethnicity were abandoned.

## **SOCIOECONOMIC/GEOGRAPHIC FACTORS**

### **2002**

In terms of socioeconomic/geographic factors, mothers of abandoned and surrendered infants crossed the spectrum in 2002. However, it is notable that in 2002, 7 of the 13 abandoned infants (two who survived and five who died) and 7 of the 10 surrendered infants were found/surrendered in economically depressed neighborhoods in Service Planning Areas (SPAs) 6, 7 and 8, SPAs with higher numbers of youth living below the poverty line. Further, six of these infants were found/surrendered within a few miles of the Harbor Freeway in more impoverished areas of the County. On the other hand, no infants were abandoned or surrendered in SPA 5, a SPA with significantly fewer children living below the poverty line. Finally, of the five surrendering parties who provided information as to their motivation to surrender, four indicated that they could not provide for the infant they were surrendering. One of these families indicated that they were homeless. In 2002, economic factors appeared to play a role in the cases of infant abandonment and surrender in Los Angeles County. This would indicate that impoverished living conditions, access to medical care and social service support should be addressed when looking at the issue of infant abandonment.

As seen in the 2002 map following this section, safe surrenders and infant abandonment occurred across Los Angeles County in 2002. However, as noted above and as the map depicts, a majority of the infants who were abandoned and surrendered in 2002 were from the central, more urban part of the County where higher numbers of children live in poverty. As the map also shows, no reports of surrendered or abandoned infants were reported in SPA 5 (West Los Angeles) and one infant was abandoned in SPA 1 (Antelope Valley), two SPAs with the lowest numbers of children living below poverty.

### **2003**

As in 2002, mothers of abandoned and surrendered infants crossed the socioeconomic/geographic spectrum in 2003. However, unlike the infants abandoned and surrendered in 2002, there was no “clustering” of cases in specific SPAs, especially those with higher poverty levels in 2003. It is of note that four infants were abandoned and three infants were safely surrendered in SPAs 6, 7 and 8, SPAs with higher levels of child poverty. However, no infants were abandoned and one infant was safely surrendered in SPA 4, which has one of the highest levels of child poverty in the County. In addition, the two SPAs with the lowest levels of children living in poverty, SPA 1 and SPA 5, experienced between them one case of safe surrender and two cases of abandoned deceased infants. It should be noted that one of the abandoned deceased infants in SPA 5 was found in the Marina del Rey Harbor, and it is unknown where this infant’s body was originally dumped or where the infant’s mother resided at the time of the infant’s birth/death. Unfortunately, very little is known about mothers’ motivation for surrendering their infants in 2003; while economics is potentially a real factor, it cannot be stated with certainty that economic factors played a role in surrendering decisions in 2003.

As seen in the 2003 map following this section, safe surrenders and infant abandonment occurred across Los Angeles County, and events occurred in all eight SPAs. Although a number of these events occurred in more urban areas of the County where children live in poverty, incidents of abandonment and surrender also occurred in areas populated by those of middle and upper economic statuses in 2003.

In summary, a review of the cases of infant abandonment and safe surrender in 2002 suggests that public information campaigns target communities where abandonment and the possibility of safe surrenders are most prevalent. However, data from 2003 speak to the importance of public information efforts that not only target such at-risk communities, but reach all areas and socioeconomic groups in Los Angeles County. This calls for a broad countywide effort.



## **AWARENESS OF THE SAFE HAVEN LAW**

While it has been somewhat difficult to obtain straightforward demographic information on the mothers who safely surrendered and abandoned their children in 2002 and 2003, it has been nearly impossible to obtain information regarding mothers' awareness of the Safe Haven law. How did those who surrendered their infants become aware of the law? Were mothers who abandoned their infants aware of the law and, if so, why did they fail to take advantage of the law? What are the barriers preventing women from safely surrendering their children rather than abandoning them in an unsafe manner? An inability to obtain these types of data is unfortunate; this information would be most helpful in providing direction for best implementing the law.

## **PUBLIC INFORMATION EFFORTS**

However, even with inherent difficulties in gathering data, the data collected do provide some direction in better implementing the law. We have learned that any public information campaign must be very broad; it must be directed to females of all childbearing ages, ethnicities, socioeconomic classes and geographic locations throughout Los Angeles County. Further, information must reach those individuals who surround women of childbearing age; families, friends and co-workers must be made aware of the option to surrender and support women at risk for abandoning or harming their infants in choosing this option. Those women who abandoned their infants and were available to provide information indicated a great need to deny their pregnancies and took tremendous effort to hide their pregnancies due to fear of their families' reactions. They were fearful of disappointing them or bringing shame on them. In some instances, they were afraid they would lose their support or even the right to live with their families if their pregnancies became known. Although it may be uncomfortable to ask a woman if she is pregnant and provide her with support, ignoring suspicions and colluding in a woman's denial of her pregnancy, as apparently occurred in some cases of infant abandonment, must be challenged. The message should highlight that even if a woman's unplanned pregnancy is upsetting or violates an individual's moral or religious values, he or she must move beyond this—failing to do so could mean a child's life.

Efforts to reach the public continue to include public service announcements, bumper stickers, signs on buses, etc. developed by the California Department of Social Services and First 5 LA. These efforts must persevere and expand to reach a broad cross section of the Los Angeles County community. In addition, efforts to reach young women and men should be undertaken in our schools and communities.

ICAN established and continues to operate a Speaker's Bureau available to provide presentations on the law to public and private agencies. To date, over 700 individuals from the public and private sector have been provided with information through this Speakers' Bureau. Part of this effort consistently includes a request that those who have heard the information share the information with their colleagues, friends and family. In addition, a "train the trainers" seminar was conducted for staff from numerous County agencies so that these trainers could then provide information on the law to staff in their agencies.

ICAN continues to work with the Coroner, DCFS, District Attorney, and law enforcement agencies to collect data on safely surrendered and abandoned infants in Los Angeles County. It is hoped that, with continued efforts, additional information and answers to tougher questions will be forthcoming, and this will only serve to shed light on better ways to implement the law.

The good news is that eighteen infants were safely surrendered in Los Angeles County in 2002 and 2003; seventeen of these infants have been placed with families for adoption through the Department of Children and Family Services Adoptions Division, and one child was reclaimed and returned to her mother. It is hoped that as the public becomes aware of the Safe Haven Law, Supervisor Knabe's goal of "no children thrown away ever" will be realized.

### **Safe Surrenders**

For data collection purposes and consistency across County Departments involved with safely surrendered children, the following criteria were established to define a safely surrendered infant:

- under 72 hours of age **AND**
- surrendered at a hospital, fire station or with paramedics (including those left in the designated Safe Surrender receptacle at Pomona Valley Medical Center or surrendered at non-designated fire stations, as parent's intention was to follow the law) **OR** delivered at a hospital and mother clearly indicates that she is aware of the law and wishes to surrender her child under the law (as differentiated from cases in which hospital staff notify mother of the surrender option upon learning mother may not wish to keep the baby).

*Excluded* from data collection as safely surrendered are infants with any evidence of abuse or neglect, including those with positive toxicology screens. It should be noted that, while the law decriminalizes a specified act of abandonment, it does not impact the necessity of a child abuse investigation; in other words, a positive toxicology screen may necessitate an assessment by the Department of Children and Family Services as to the safety of other children (e.g., siblings) possibly at risk due to parental substance abuse.

### **Safely Surrendered Infants**

**In 2002, 10 infants were safely surrendered in Los Angeles County. In 2003, 8 infants were safely surrendered in Los Angeles County. They fit the following demographic profile:**

	<b><u>2002</u></b>	<b><u>2003</u></b>
<b>Gender:</b>	6 females 4 males	2 females 6 males
<b>Ethnicity:</b>	6 Hispanics 3 African Americans 1 Caucasian	3 Hispanics 2 African Americans 3 Caucasians
<b>Location of Surrender – type of site:</b>		
	8 hospitals 2 fire stations/paramedics	5 hospitals 3 fire stations/paramedics

#### **Location of Surrender – geographic area:**

##### **2002**

2 were surrendered in Downey (both in zip code 90241)  
2 were surrendered in Los Angeles (zip codes 90033 and 90059)  
1 was surrendered in Bellflower (zip code 90706)  
1 was surrendered in El Monte (zip code 91731-1363)  
1 was surrendered in Glendale (zip code 91204)  
1 was surrendered in Long Beach (zip code 90801)  
1 was surrendered in West Covina (zip code 91723)  
1 was surrendered in Wilmington (zip code 90744)

##### **2003**

1 was surrendered in Arcadia (zip code 91006)  
1 was surrendered in Gardena (zip code 90247)  
1 was surrendered in Lakewood (zip code 90712)  
1 was surrendered in Lancaster (zip code 93534)  
1 was surrendered in Los Angeles (zip code 90027)  
1 was surrendered in Northridge (zip code 91328)  
1 was surrendered in Pico Rivera (zip code 90660)  
1 was surrendered in Pomona (zip code 91767)

**Date of Surrender:**

<b><u>2002</u></b>	<b><u>2003</u></b>
2 in March (3/21 & 3/26/02)	2 in January (1/11 & 1/20/03)
1 in July (7/30/02)	1 in May (5/2/03)
1 in August (8/22/02)	2 in June (6/12 & 6/24/03)
1 in October (10/31/02)	1 in November (11/11/03)
3 in November (11/21, 11/26 & 11/27/02)	2 in December (12/23 & 12/25/03)
2 in December (12/16 & 12/26/02)	

**Relationship of Surrendering Party (as identified by the surrendering party)**

<b><u>2002</u></b>	<b><u>2003</u></b>
8 – Mother	7 - Mother
1 – Father	1 - Mother's neighbor
1 – Mother's Friend	

**Case Dispositions:**

All ten infants who were safely surrendered in **2002** have been adopted or are in the process of being adopted through the Department of Children and Family Services Adoptions Division.

Seven of the eight infants who were safely surrendered in **2003** have been adopted or are in the process of being adopted through the Department of Children and Family Services Adoptions Division. The eighth infant was reclaimed by her birth mother and returned to her mother's care by the Juvenile Dependency Court.

## **Safely Surrendering Mothers**

It should be noted that it is inherently difficult to obtain data about mothers who safely surrender their children in California. The law is intended to assure confidentiality to mothers or other surrendering parties, and this assurance limits access to information. What we know about the mothers who safely surrendered their newborns in 2002 and 2003 is based primarily on what these mothers or other surrendering parties may have disclosed to those to whom they safely surrendered, e.g., hospital emergency room personnel or fire department staff.

In addition, in **2002**, three of the surrendering mothers were identified; one registered and gave birth at a hospital under her real name and two identified themselves at the time of surrender. In **2003**, two mothers gave birth at hospitals and identified themselves. In addition, one surrendering party identified herself as someone who had “found” the infant abandoned in a public place. She provided her cell phone number to hospital staff and when law enforcement contacted her to obtain more information, she admitted to being the infant’s mother.

### **Age**

In 2002, mothers’ ages were known in half the cases of safe surrender and ranged from age 17 to 42. In 2003, mothers’ ages were known in six of the eight surrenders and ranged from age 17 to 31.

#### **2002**

1 17-year old  
2 25-year olds  
1 31-year old  
1 42-year old  
(5 Unknown)

#### **2003**

1 17-year old  
2 19-year olds  
1 23-year old  
1 26-year old  
1 31-year old  
(2 Unknown)

### **Ethnicity**

#### **2002**

5 Hispanics  
2 African Americans  
1 Caucasian  
2 Unknown

#### **2003**

2 Hispanics  
2 African Americans  
2 Caucasians  
2 Unknown

## **Marital Status**

In **2002**, marital status was unknown for 7 of the 10 surrendering mothers. Of the 3 with known status, 2 were reportedly married and one was single.

In **2003**, marital status was unknown for 7 of the 8 surrendering mothers. The remaining mother indicated that she was single.

## **Employment**

In **2002**, mothers' employment status was unknown in 7 of the 10 cases of safe surrender. Of the three known, one was a homemaker, one was a student and one was a live-in domestic worker.

In **2003**, mothers' employment status was unknown in 7 of the 8 cases of safe surrender. The remaining mother was an Emergency Medical Technician in the military at the time she safely surrendered her newborn.

## **Religious Affiliation**

In **2002**, mothers' religious affiliation was known for only one surrendering mother. This mother reported that she practiced the Catholic faith.

In **2003**, the religious affiliation of the eight surrendering mothers is unknown.

## **Family Circumstances**

### **2002**

For 5 of the 10 cases of safe surrender, we know nothing of the mother's family situation. For the remaining 5, the following was reported:

One mother lived with the father of the surrendered infant along with their other 4 young children and the father's family.

One mother and father were married and had 3 other children; they were reportedly homeless and unable to care for the surrendered infant.

One mother with an unknown marital status had 5 other children.

One mother lived with her own mother.

One mother recently arrived from Mexico and reported no family or friends in this country.

## **2003**

For 4 of the 8 cases of safe surrender, we know nothing of the mother's family situation. For the remaining 4, the following was reported:

One 26-year old mother indicated she had two older children. It is unknown if these children resided with their mother or with whom the mother resided.

One 23-year old mother lived with her parents and one older child.

One 19-year old mother lived in a military dormitory. She was single and had no other children.

One 31-year old mother had four older children, all of whom had been removed from her custody and adopted into other families due to the mother's long-standing substance abuse problems.

## **Involvement of Fathers**

We know very little about the involvement of fathers in these safely surrendered cases. In **2002**, we know only that fathers were involved and living with the mothers in two cases, as listed above. In **2003**, we know that one father was stationed in the military on the East Coast and unaware of the mother's (his girlfriend's) pregnancy. For a second case, we have the father's name and age (28) only. For the remaining cases of safe surrender, we have no information on the fathers.

## **Other Children**

In **2002**, three mothers reported having other children, one mother reported she had no other children, and it is unknown if the remaining six mothers had other children. Of those with children, one reported 3 other children, one reported 4 other children, and one reported 5 other children. These children all reportedly resided with their mothers.

In **2003**, three mothers reported having other children, one reported no other children, and it is unknown if the remaining four mothers had other children. Of those with children, one reported having 1 other child, one reported 2 other children, and one mother reported 4 other children.



### **Known History of Domestic Violence**

In both **2002** and **2003**, there is no reported history of domestic violence for the mothers in the cases of safe surrender, but obtaining this information would be difficult at best.

### **Known History of Substance Abuse**

For **2002**, there is no reported history of substance abuse for the mothers in the 10 cases of safe surrender. In **2003**, one of the safely surrendering mothers had a history of methamphetamine abuse. For the other mothers, it is unknown if there were issues of substance abuse, but obtaining this information would be difficult at best.

### **Status of Pregnancy** (including status, details, concealment and reason for concealment)

Again, very little is known about the pregnancy status for the mothers who safely surrendered. It is reported that one mother who safely surrendered in **2002** and one mother who safely surrendered in **2003** each indicated their child was the result of an unplanned pregnancy.

### **Awareness of the Safe Haven Law**

In **2002**, one mother contacted the hospital to ask for procedures to safely surrender her child. In **2003**, one mother received prenatal care at a clinic where she saw “No Shame. No Blame. No Names.” posters publicizing the law. For all others, nothing is known about the surrendering parties’ awareness of the law.

## **Motivation to Surrender**

### **2002**

One mother and father indicated that they were overwhelmed caring for four other children, financially strapped and incapable of providing for another child. They were not interested in placing the child with relatives.

In a second case, the father who surrendered the infant reported that he and the mother had three other children, were homeless and could not provide for another child.

In a third case, the mother reportedly stated that she could not care for a sixth child.

One mother indicated that she had hidden her pregnancy and wanted to safely surrender, as she did not want her mother, with whom she lived, to know of her pregnancy.

Finally, one mother who gave birth in the hospital indicated that she became aware of her pregnancy late in the pregnancy and could not care for an infant.

### **2003**

One mother indicated that she had a job offer in another state and did not want a child “tying her down.”

In a second case, the mother reportedly lived with parents from whom she had concealed her pregnancy and the child’s birth. It is unknown what motivated her to conceal this information.

In a third case, the mother reported that she was afraid to keep her infant, as she believed it would jeopardize her military career. Upon learning that being a mother would not have a negative impact on her military service, she reclaimed her infant within the 14-day period permitted in the law.

**Medical Questionnaires** – In **2002**, only one surrendering party out of ten completed a medical questionnaire regarding the surrendered infant. In addition, four surrendering parties provided some medical background information in other formats. Unfortunately, for five surrendered infants, no medical information was received from the surrendering party. In **2003**, *none* of the eight surrendering parties completed a medical questionnaire. One mother “left medical information with the hospital.”

**Reclaiming** – SB 1368 provides the parent or other surrendering party with a 14-day period in which he or she can seek to reclaim the surrendered infant.

In **2002**, one mother made an initial attempt to reclaim her child. In this case, the mother reportedly returned to the hospital where she had surrendered her child and asked about having the child returned to her care. As the child was already in the custody of the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS), the mother was referred to DCFS to seek reclamation. Mother reportedly did not follow up and contact the Department.

In **2003**, one mother successfully reclaimed her infant. As DCFS had already taken temporary custody of the child and filed a petition with Juvenile Court, the DCFS Social Worker assessed the potential safety of the child and supported the mother's request to have the child returned to her care. At the detention hearing, the Juvenile Court returned the child to the mother. In a second case in 2003, a mother attempted to reclaim her child but the Juvenile Court declined her request due to safety concerns related to mother's long-standing and ongoing substance abuse problems. Although family reunification services were offered by the Court and DCFS, the mother did not avail herself of these services and her child was eventually adopted.

### **Abandoned Infants**

Unfortunately, despite the passage of SB 1368 allowing parents to safely surrender their newborns as of January 1, 2001, 13 infants were abandoned in an unsafe manner in 2002; five of these infants survived while 8 were killed or left to die by their mothers. In 2003, 8 infants were abandoned in an unsafe manner; only one infant survived and 7 of these infants were killed or left to die by their mothers. Data regarding the mothers and infants in these cases are limited by the nature of the act; mothers who illegally abandon and harm their children are likely to conceal their actions and identities. If law enforcement is unable to identify these mothers, we have very little information. If mothers who have abandoned their infants are identified, the information we receive is often limited by what information the mothers are willing to provide, especially in light of efforts made on their behalf to defend them in criminal actions.

### **Abandoned Surviving Infants**

For data collection purposes and consistency across County Departments involved with safely surrendered children, the following criteria were established to define an abandoned surviving infant:

- under 72 hours of age **AND**
- abandoned in a public location (e.g., dumpsters, alleys, rail yards, residence steps, stairwells, etc.) **OR** private location (e.g., hidden and/or abandoned in private residence closets, bathtubs, wastebaskets, etc.) and yet manages to survive.

*Excluded* from data collection as abandoned surviving infant are:

- infants “abandoned” in the care of persons, even those who are strangers to the parent
- infants left in hospitals after birth by mothers who fail to make plans for their care (i.e., “boarder babies”)

### **Abandoned Surviving Infants - 2002**

As previously stated, **5 infants survived abandonment in 2002**. They fit the following demographic profile:

**Gender:** 4 males and 1 female

**Ethnicity:** 4 Hispanics and 1 African American (with Native American ancestry)

#### **Location of Abandonment – type of site:**

2 infants were found in dumpsters/trash receptacles  
1 infant was located in a hospital parking lot  
1 infant was discovered in some bushes  
1 infant was located on residential doorsteps

**Location of Abandonment – geographic location:**

2 were abandoned in Los Angeles (zip codes 90011 and “Florence area”)  
1 was abandoned in Canoga Park (zip code 91307)  
1 was abandoned in Monrovia (zip code 91016)  
1 was abandoned in Panorama City (zip code not provided)

**Date of Abandonment:**

1 in January (1/20/02)  
1 in February (2/4/02)  
2 in June (6/13 and 6/30/02)  
1 in December (12/16/02)

**Injuries incurred** – one abandoned surviving infant was found in a dumpster and suffered a skull fracture and subdural hematoma; the others did not suffer serious physical injuries.

**Substance Exposure** – one abandoned surviving infant tested positive for in utero exposure to marijuana.

**Case Dispositions**

One infant was returned to his mother’s care after 6 months of court-ordered family reunification services were provided by the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS). The child, his mother and older sibling remain under DCFS supervision.

The remaining 4 surviving abandoned infants were placed for adoption through the Department of Children and Family Services, Adoptions Division. One child whose mother was identified, was placed for adoption with relatives; the mothers of the other 3 infants were not identified and the children were placed for adoption with non-relatives.

### **Mothers of Surviving Abandoned Infants (2002)**

Three of the 5 mothers who abandoned infants who survived in 2002 have never been identified. Therefore, nothing is known about these mothers. The following information pertains to the 2 mothers of surviving abandoned infants who were identified by law enforcement. For purposes of confidentiality, they will be referred to as Mother A and Mother B.

**Mother A** was a 16-year old high school student at the time she abandoned her newborn son. She was single and being raised by extended relatives when she reportedly became pregnant during her first sexual encounter. She reported that the encounter was not consensual and that she became pregnant by an acquaintance she could identify by first name only. Mother A hid her pregnancy and told only her best friend of her condition. She stated that she was afraid her family would be angry with her and possibly kick her out of the home if they discovered her condition, as they frequently talked negatively about girls who became pregnant. Talking about her pregnancy, she shared some of her feelings of denial, saying, "It was like it didn't happen, it was a bad dream, like it would go away. I wasn't facing it. I was thinking about how am I going to tell my momma . . . It was hard on me. I was 15. All I had on my mind was to graduate. I feel I'm just a baby, too."

Mother A stated that she was unaware of the Safe Haven law at the time she gave birth and that had she known, she would have surrendered the baby at a hospital. She delivered her infant son by herself in her bedroom. She wrapped the newborn in towels, placed him in a plastic bag and put him in a dumpster outside her apartment building. He was discovered in the dumpster, suffering from hypothermia, subdural hematoma and skull fracture. Mother A stated that upon hearing media reports that the baby had survived, "I was happy that he was alive and somebody found him. I felt the Lord answered my prayers. When I went to school, I went on the Internet and got his picture and saved the picture."

In addition, to injuries suffered in the dumpster, Mother A's baby tested positive for exposure to marijuana. He was taken into custody by the Department of Children and Family Services and, upon mother's identification by law enforcement, placed with relatives who are in the process of adopting the child. Mother A was arrested for attempted murder as a juvenile and sentenced to probation placement until she graduated from high school.

**Mother B** was age 28, single with one older child, at the time she abandoned her newborn son. She was employed as a special education aid and resided with her mother and 6-year old daughter. Mother B concealed her pregnancy from her family and received no prenatal care. She admitted that she kept her pregnancy a secret from her family out of fear that they would be angry with her for having a second child out of wedlock. The father of the infant son she abandoned was also the father of Mother B's 6-year old daughter. He and Mother B had never lived together and he came in and out of her life.

Mother B stated that she was unaware of the Safe Haven law at the time she abandoned her son and that had she known of the option, she would have done things differently. She delivered her child alone in her residence, placed him in towels in a shopping bag and left him in a hospital parking lot. A nurse walking to her car discovered the baby when she heard his cries. Mother B was arrested for cruelty to a child likely to produce great bodily injury or death. She spent two months in jail, pled no contest to child endangerment and was sentenced to five years' probation.

Mother B's son was taken into custody by the Department of Children and Family Services. DCFS provided Mother B with family reunification services and the baby was subsequently returned to her care under DCFS supervision, residing with his mother, grandmother and older sister.

### **Abandoned Surviving Infants - 2003**

Only one newborn infant survived abandonment in 2003. This female Hispanic was found on June 27, 2003 on the front porch steps of a residential apartment in Los Angeles, 90037. She was found clean and well cared for, wrapped in blankets, by a resident of the apartment building who called 911. The infant was transported to the hospital and subsequently placed with a family approved and waiting to adopt a child. The infant was legally freed and placed for adoption. Despite diligent efforts, law enforcement has been unable to identify the infants' birth parents.



### **Abandoned Deceased Infants**

For purposes of data collection, an abandoned deceased infant is:

- under 72 hours of age **AND**
- killed (e.g., asphyxiated, stabbed, etc.) and/or dies from abandonment (e.g., dehydration, hyper/hypothermia, etc.) in a public location (e.g., dumpster, alley, rail yard, residence steps, stairwell, ocean, etc.) **OR** private location (e.g., private residence closet, bathtub, wastebasket, etc.).

As stated, tragically, **15 abandoned deceased infants were reported to ICAN by the Coroner in 2002 and 2003: 8 in 2002 and 7 in 2003.** They fit the following demographic profile:

**2002**

**Gender:** 5 females and 3 males

**Ethnicity:**

3 Hispanics  
3 African Americans  
1 Caucasian  
1 of Unknown Ethnicity ("possibly Asian")

**2003**

4 males and 3 females

2 Pacific Islanders  
1 African American  
1 Caucasian  
1 Hispanic  
2 of Unknown Ethnicity

**Location of Abandonment – type of site:**

**2002**

2 were located in private residences (one hidden under a bathroom sink and one left in a toilet).  
2 were found in dumpsters.  
2 were discovered at recycling centers. (It should be noted that one of these infants was known to have been born in a K-Mart bathroom and left in a trash can at the store.)  
1 was buried in a vacant field.  
1 washed ashore in a plastic bag.

**2003**

3 were located in private residences (one in a suitcase, one hidden in a closet and one found in the back yard)  
2 were found in dumpsters  
1 was found in the ocean  
1 was found at the entrance of a church

## **Location of Abandonment/Discovery – geographic location:**

### **2002**

3 were found in Los Angeles (zip codes 90011, 90021 and 90002 – although mother known to have given birth in Los Angeles, 90043).  
1 was found in Carson (zip code 90248).  
1 was found in City of Industry (zip code 91733 – although the infant was found in recycled trash that originated in Azusa).  
1 was found in Long Beach (zip code not provided).  
1 was found in Palmdale (zip code 93551).  
1 was found in Moreno Valley (although mother known to have resided in Inglewood, 90303).

### **2003**

2 were found in Los Angeles (zip codes 90023 and 90043)  
1 was found in Carson (zip code 90745)  
1 was found in Marina del Rey (zip code 90252)  
1 was found in Northridge (zip code 91343)  
1 was found in Santa Clarita (zip code 91321)  
1 was found in Westchester (zip code 90045)

## **Date of Abandonment/Discovery:**

### **2002**

1 in January (1/5/02)  
1 in February (2/9/02)  
1 in June (6/10/02)  
2 in July (7/2 and 7/9/02)  
1 in November (11/16/02)  
2 in December (both on 12/10/02)

### **2003**

1 in January (1/28/03)  
2 in February (2/4 and 2/12/03)  
1 in May (5/3/03)  
1 in August (8/11/03)  
1 in October (10/26/03)  
1 in December (12/31/03)

**Cause of Death per Coroner:**

**2002**

- 2 - pneumonia, chorioamnionitis  
and other undetermined factors
- 2 - asphyxia & other undetermined  
causes
- 1 - multiple blunt injuries
- 1 - multiple traumatic injuries
- 1 - exsanguination & possible suffocation
- 1 - cause not established

**2003**

- 3 - asphyxia
- 1 - head trauma and other  
undetermined factors
- 1 - “peripartum fetal demise”
- 1 - perinatal demise – caretaker  
neglect
- 1 - “lack of peripartum care”

**Final mode of Death per Coroner:**

**2002:** 7 Homicide and 1 Undetermined

**2003:** 7 Homicide

### **Mothers of Deceased Abandoned Infants (2002)**

Five of the eight mothers who abandoned their newborns who died in 2002 have never been identified. Therefore, nothing is known about these mothers. The following information pertains to the three mothers of deceased abandoned infants who were identified by law enforcement. For purposes of confidentiality they are referred to as Mother C, Mother D and Mother E.

**Mother C** was a single, 21-year old student residing with extended relatives who had raised her since she was a child and whom she considered to be her mother and father. She became pregnant by her boyfriend. At about the time she was planning to tell him of her pregnancy, she learned that he had been unfaithful to her and decided not to tell him. She told no one of her pregnancy and made efforts to hide her condition, including wearing baggy clothes, as her relative caregivers had previously stated that if any of the girls in the home became pregnant they would be kicked out.

It is unknown if Mother C was aware of the Safe Haven law. When she went into labor, she went into the bathroom and turned the shower on to drown out any noise. She gave birth to the child, wrapped her in a shirt and hid her under the bathroom sink. Her caregivers became suspicious of the amount of time Mother C was in the bathroom and when they entered the bathroom, they observed blood in the shower. Mother C told them that she had suffered a miscarriage and they transported her to the hospital where doctors determined she had given birth to a full term child. One of the caregivers returned home and discovered the deceased infant under the bathroom sink and called 911.

Mother C pled guilty to child abuse leading to death and was sentenced to six years in State prison.

**Mother D**, age 34, was a divorced mother of five at the time of her newborn's death. She hid her pregnancy from everyone except her boyfriend who was the baby's father. She later stated that she denied her pregnancy to others as she knew her family would be disappointed and she did not want her children or other family members to worry about her.

Mother D went into labor at her place of employment, a private day care center. She delivered the baby by herself in the day care bathroom and placed the baby in the bathtub. She later wrapped the baby in a plastic bag and directed her boyfriend to dispose of the child. Her boyfriend transported the infant to a vacant field in an adjacent county and buried the infant's body. Mother's employer later became suspicious and contacted police who were directed to the baby's body by mother's boyfriend.

Mother D's surviving children were removed from her care by the Department of Children and Family Services. Her boyfriend was originally charged in the baby's death, but charges were dismissed, possibly in an effort to gain his testimony against the mother. Mother D was charged with murder and child abuse resulting in death; she pled guilty to child abuse resulting in death and was sentenced to four years in State prison. It is unknown if mother knew of the Safe Haven law at the time she abandoned her baby, as mother has consistently stated that she had a miscarriage, the baby was stillborn and she did not harm her baby.

**Mother E**, age 17, was single and resided with her parents and three younger siblings at the time she gave birth. She claimed she had not had sexual relations in 18 months and denied knowing she was pregnant until she went into labor. She went into labor by herself in the family bathroom and gave birth to an infant boy in the toilet. She made no effort to remove the infant from the toilet, claiming that she thought the submerged infant was stillborn as he was not moving or crying. Mother E called out to family members who observed the child in the toilet but did not remove the baby until approximately ten minutes later when Mother E's boyfriend arrived at the home and was instructed to do so by 911 personnel he had contacted.

Mother E's boyfriend and family members denied any knowledge that Mother E had been pregnant, although responding emergency personnel indicated that it was obvious she had been pregnant; she was not a large woman and the baby was full term, weighing 9 lbs. Paramedics observed family members to be inappropriate and unconcerned with the infant's well-being.

Mother E's boyfriend, father of the deceased infant, was charged with unlawful sex with a minor as he was 26 years of age and Mother E had just turned 17 when she became pregnant. Law enforcement continues to investigate the circumstances of this case to determine if a presentation will be made to the District Attorney for possible charges against the mother. It is unknown if Mother E was aware of the Safe Haven law; she continues to insist that she was unaware that she was pregnant and that her child was stillborn.

### **Mothers of Deceased Abandoned Infants (2003)**

Five of the seven mothers who abandoned newborns who died in 2003 have never been identified. Therefore, nothing is known about these mothers. The following information pertains to the two mothers of deceased abandoned infants who were identified by law enforcement. For purposes of confidentiality they are referred to as Mother F and Mother G.

#### **Mother F**

Mother F was a single 22-year old who had recently received her college degree in her native country. An unmarried woman and recent immigrant in the United States, she was working in the retail industry when she became pregnant. Terrified of disgracing her family by giving birth out of wedlock, she hid her pregnancy from her family and friends. She gave birth to a full term male alone in the family's bathroom. When the infant began crying, she put her hand over his mouth and strangled him. She put the infant's body in a suitcase and hid it in her bedroom. When Mother F sought medical treatment for herself, medical professionals at the hospital determined that she had given birth and questioned her about the location of the infant. While initially providing inconsistent stories, she eventually admitted to killing the child. Mother F provided no information on the baby's father or circumstances of her pregnancy.

The Coroner ruled the baby's death a homicide caused by asphyxiation; Mother F was arrested for murder and assault on a child under age eight, leading to death. She was convicted of both counts by jury trial and awaits sentencing. Mother F indicated through legal counsel that she was unaware of the Safe Haven Law at the time she gave birth and killed her newborn.



## **Mother G**

Mother G was a 16-year old high school student who resided with her mother and father. She realized she was pregnant after breaking up with her boyfriend and hid her pregnancy from her family and ex-boyfriend, by whom she was pregnant. Shortly before her baby's birth, Mother G's parents confronted her about her weight gain and asked if she was pregnant, but Mother G denied her pregnancy and her parents did not press her further.

Mother G gave birth alone to a male infant in her bedroom and stuffed tissue in his mouth because he was crying. She tied his umbilical cord around his neck three times, wrapped his body in a towel and plastic bag and hid him in her bedroom closet. Mother's G's mother discovered blood on the bedroom carpet and found the deceased infant. Mother G told her mother that she had suffered a miscarriage, and her mother and father transported her and the deceased newborn to the hospital. At the emergency room, Mother G's doctor determined that she had delivered a full term infant and asked for the contents of the plastic bag, containing the newborn's deceased body. The hospital turned the infant's remains over to the Coroner's Office, and an autopsy determined that the infant had been born alive and died due to ligature strangulation. The baby's death was ruled a homicide and charges against Mother G are pending.